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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 002144

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SF](#)  
SUBJECT: SAG SERVICES FALLING SHORT IN SOUTH AFRICA'S  
FARMLANDS

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Summary  
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¶1. Challenges the SAG faces in extending social services to the rural poor were evident on a recent visit to the tiny township of Tigane, in the mostly rural Northwest Province, to observe a community forum between local social workers and government officials. Discussion centered on provision of SAG monetary grants, health care, public services, job creation, and schooling to the area's poor and underserved black families, particularly farm workers historically subject to abuse by employers and neglect by the SAG. The 'town hall' style workshop was organized by local NGO Hurisa with USG funding. The event boosted public awareness of rights and services, not just in theory but in actionable practice, and it encouraged grass-roots dialogue to promote take-up of SAG services. End Summary.

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Background: DHRF Grant to Hurisa  
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¶2. On September 12 poloff attended one of nine USG-sponsored workshops to be held in three underdeveloped provinces, led by the Human Rights Institute of South Africa (Hurisa). The latter local NGO is the recipient of a \$27,000 USG grant to improve awareness among rural communities of their socio-economic rights and entitlements to basic government services. This funding is from DRL's annual Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF). Hurisa is a rights advocacy NGO focused since 1995 on the plight of women in poor and underdeveloped rural areas. This project proposes to increase women's awareness of their socio-economic rights, mechanisms for redress, and government delivery of basic services; to support advocacy to improve conditions in rural areas; and to encourage dialogue on rights between government and civil society. The project began with a train-the-trainer workshop in Johannesburg to coach nine community social workers from three of South Africa's poorest and most neglected provinces (Northwest, Limpopo, and Eastern Cape). Participants then lead workshops in their home areas for a minimum of 15 local community workers.

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Northwest Province: Afrikaner Farms, and Mines  
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¶3. The Northwest province was targeted for Hurisa's workshops because government services often do not reach its poor and dispersed rural population. The provincial license plate -- depicting a cow, a sunflower, and an ear of corn -- illustrates that this is farming country, with a landscape much like that of the U.S. Midwest. The license plate also

reflects the region's other major industry -- mining for gold, platinum, and (lately) uranium -- with a picture of an old-time shaft and the slogan "The Platinum Province."

¶4. The Northwest is a heavily Afrikaans-speaking area, a core territory colonized by Boer settlers, and a former heartland of support for the apartheid system. While extremes of rich and poor exist throughout South Africa, they are all the more striking in small towns, where a swanky golf club is just around the bend from a field of shanty shacks. Here where mines and farms are nearly the only sources of jobs for poor blacks, there continue to be reports of abuse of laborers by employers, as well as periodic incidents of reprisal killings of white farm owners. Yet there are also glimpses of gradual progress: a prosperous-looking school, probably once segregated for whites only, was crowded at recess with uniformed black children, suggesting brighter prospects for the next generation.

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Tiny Tigane Township: Off the Map  
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¶5. Poloff observed the third of Hurisa's workshops in the Northwest, this one held in Tigane, a township too small to appear even on detailed road maps. On a low rise overlooking farmlands, we found Tigane, a cluster of standard two-room homes. The settlement is just large enough to possess a town hall, a high-ceilinged brick room with a stage. The two dozen participants were mostly women, of all ages, both farm

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worker representatives and social workers caring for orphans, disabled persons, and HIV/AIDS patients. They opened the meeting with enthusiastic singing of traditional hymns. Discussion was then conducted partly in English, for the benefit of Hurisa's project officer not from this region, and partly in the local language of Sutswana.

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Social Development Programs - and Hurdles  
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¶6. After an overview by Hurisa of human rights fundamentals, SAG officials gave short presentations outlining public services to which audience members were entitled. Officials appeared to be knowledgeable in their fields, genuinely dedicated to the community's welfare, and eager for the audience to know what the SAG could offer them. The Department of Social Development (DSD)'s Matilda Malefo enumerated family and child care programs; SAG grants for child support, disability, and oldage; and specialized care for HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. In these areas, DSD outreach officers were assigned to visit Tigane twice a week, she said. Job creation programs were targeting the local agriculture, mining, and tourism sectors in activities like livestock breeding and fish farming. A poverty alleviation fund was accepting proposals for community cooperatives, such as a brick making venture under consideration in Tigane.

¶7. The audience bombarded Malefo with problems. Foremost was the hurdle of identity cards, which many rural people lacked. Social workers were unable to assist unregistered persons in obtaining grants. Mothers who lacked IDs could not get birth certificates for babies. One old person had waited six years for a home visit by DSD to become eligible for old age grants. Malefo acknowledged that visits to distant farms could indeed be infrequent. (One social worker later told poloff, "They say they do all these things," she said, "but in fact we never see them!") Asked whether Social Development had sufficient resources to fulfill its mandates, Malefo replied that DSD did have money but was hampered by its shortage of social workers. Community workers complained that the "jobs" created by DSD were unpaid volunteer roles in HIV/AIDS home care and orphans' centers, with financial

support limited to transport and supplies. Transport to and from the distant farms was an obstacle for all concerned.

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Health Care Aspirations -- and Realities  
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¶8. A representative of the Department of Health (DoH) announced that a new health center had been established nearby, for access to HIV/AIDS antiretroviral (ARV) therapy and tuberculosis medications, eliminating longer trips to the more distant district hospital. Community representatives, however, asserted that medicines at local clinics were chronically in short supply. "Whatever you come for, all they have is Panadol," said one vexed social worker. The DoH officer attributed the hiccups to a shortage of staff, with one of his two staff on maternity leave and the other having to cover administrative, statutory, and court case duties as well as tending to patients in the field.

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Municipal Initiatives -- Stymied by Farmers  
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¶9. The role of the City Council was to allocate state land for public use, such as for schools or police stations, to provide public sports and recreation facilities, and to furnish public utility services such as water, electricity, and refuse removal. Council member Mr. Fezile Canga admitted that Matlosana was still struggling to fulfill the minimum requirements of clean water, flush toilets, electricity, and street lighting for all residents as specified in the SAG's Rural Development Plan. But progress was being made, including in the extension of piped water in lieu of failing wells.

¶10. The municipality's economic development section was working to acquire farm land for public use and to encourage new business growth. A new uranium mine would soon generate new jobs, population, housing, and ancillary businesses, and the Mayor had further stipulated community development commitments from business investors. Through a Black

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Economic Empowerment (BEE) initiative, the mine would establish a technical college in an old disused hostel building, to teach area workers the skills to develop mine inputs and materials locally. Matlosana was even hosting a Global Investors Conference in Klerksdorp in late September, in an effort to showcase regional businesses and attract foreign investment.

¶11. The Executive Mayor had launched "people's forums" with all government departments in attendance, available to assist community petitioners. When the municipality held public meetings, however, few citizens attended, and too often the meetings degenerated into debates on national politics. Canga appealed to the audience to attend those meetings, so that one hundred residents would not make decisions for thousands. Matlosana had newly received a development grant of 210 million Rand (about \$28 million), and Canga urged community leaders to participate in the allocation of those funds according to their local needs -- "not a Freedom Square like Soweto, not a swimming pool, but practical things for Tigane."

¶12. A participant raised the matter of poor school attendance by farm workers' children, due to long travel distances and lack of transport. This was not being detected because of officials' infrequent visits to distant properties. Canga responded that schools, including farm schools, were the responsibility of the Department of Education (DoE), which was also the provider of bus transport. The municipality could, however, lobby the DoE on its citizens' behalf. (Comment: Local governments' lack of

involvement in school issues, and in the effort to ensure farm workers' rights are respected, is symptomatic of a larger, structural problem. End comment.)

¶13. Canga candidly acknowledged that on area farms there were still problems of beatings of laborers, of withholding of electricity, and of denial by farmers of access to roads crossing their property. In townships the municipality was proceeding with implementation of public works like roads, lighting, and plumbing, but on private farm land they required farm owners' written consent, which was on some occasions refused. Care of farm workers was historically and legally considered to be the duty of the farm owner. The Council could do "very little" for farm workers other than urge farmers to sell the land. A land audit was being taken to highlight parcels which were leased, rather than privately owned, where the municipality could exert more influence.

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